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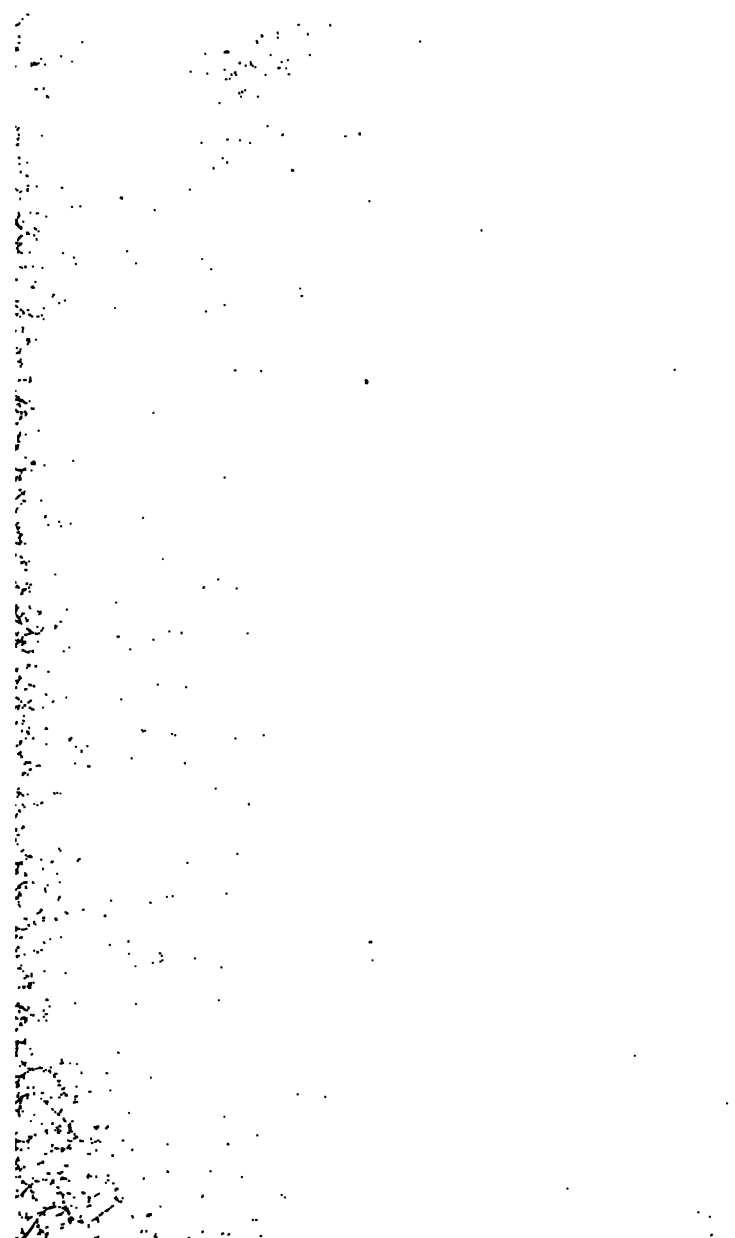
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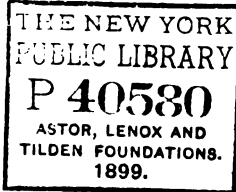
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ESTHER;

OR,



THE TRUE AND THE BEAUTIFUL.

A POEM.

NEW YORK
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BY
NOBODY NOTHING,
OF NOWHERE.
[i.e. James Alexander Young]

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ESTHER;

OR,

THE TRUE AND THE BEAUTIFUL.

Δηλωσιν και αληθειαν—LXX.



HY roams the mind of man in
search of truth,

Why throbs the heart of man
with deathless love,

If all we see is but an empty
show,

If all we love is buried in the grave?

Far better we as senseless as the brute,

Beyond this world, unconscious of a thought—

Beyond this life, unconscious of a hope;

Then might we live unloved, and die unwept,

ESTHER.

Nor love in vain, nor mourn as fruitless here
Mysterious being objectless as vain—
A waif of time upon the shores of Space.

What now the silent past? The joys, the woes,
Which darkened or illumed its flying hours?
Gone, altogether gone, forever lost to me;
Like billows rolling in our wake—submerged
Within the bosom of life's boundless sea?
Eternity had rolled to usher in
Those winged moments, all so lightly flown;
Eternity must lapse ere all I've loved
And lost on earth shall vanish from my heart.

What now the world of yesterday? Morning,
Noon, night? The mists and shadows of the dawn,
The skies serene, the matin song of birds,
The grateful perfume of the opening flowers,

ESTHER.

The dew-gemmed earth, all radiant in the sun?
Or sleeping, calm as infancy in dreams,
Beneath the pale, sad moon? That world itself,
With all its wondrous harmonies of life,
Gone, like a fitful dream of yesternight.

Strange are these lapses, stranger yet in all
Were they not looked upon until the eye
Wearied of wonders. Wherefore is it so:
Life lapsing into death forever here—
All life without fruition? Yet I feel
Within my inmost being that I am
A sentient Spirit, all unlike my life,
In that I do not perish! Wherefore, then,
Fails life, if I am deathless? Can it be
The world, like me, exists; unlike me, dies?
I weary of conjecture! What is true?
Is all beyond me a material world,

ESTHER.

Or, stranger yet, that world a phantasy,
And all we look upon—Earth, Air, and Sea—
Illusions of the minds reflecting them?

Strange if it should be so! Yet stranger far
E'en as it is—a Revelation all—
Our God at work, and manifest as well,
Save to those eyes yet blinded by their sins,
Who find impurity in what is pure,
And death in *that* which is the source of life;—
The darkness which has plagued us since the fall,
And, as a *curse*, imposed upon the world.

As erst appeared on Jordan's banks of old—
When Jesus, passing through that turbid flood,
Not to be cleansed,—but *clean* all earthly things,—
Came forth, in view of all, the Sinless Man,
To manifest the Deity to us,
In Body as in Soul—our God and Lord!
In Body as in Soul? Then all beyond

ESTHER.

We look upon is God, *in truth* as well,
Since all is *one* with us as we with Christ,
(The whole embodiment of things around,)
And so partakes of purity in God,
The true *embodiment* prepared for Him,
Which, constantly renewed through his whole life,
Left not a trace behind it in the grave.
The Lamb of God in *body* as in soul!
This world is Something *only* as in Christ,
The True revealed in Beauty, God to Man,
To point the way of the eternal World.

A Revelation all it is—no more,
No less; else must we needs suppose as well
A huge material world, produced of naught,
Forced into being by mere act of power,
And kept in being by the power which made.
A most absurd conclusion when 'tis reached;

ESTHER.

In contradiction of the written Word,
And as at war with all our sense of things.
Th' impossible made possible! Something
Produced of nothing! Nothing made t' appear!

Or God has wrought, of some chaotic mass,
As void of all proportion and design,
The world around us, to subserve His ends,
Compelling us t' admit, what's more absurd,
Of *two* existences, both infinite,
And each contending for the mastery—
Eternal Matter and eternal Mind!
Or, what were most absurd of all, to hold
This gross material world as *one* with God,
And all the contradictions it involves,
And all the shame and sorrow that ensue!

A Revelation all it is—no more,
No less; and wherefore should we doubt of this,

ESTHER.

Since God is present everywhere in all,
And working out His ends in us and it,
In presence and in power through the whole?
And we, in Him, partaking of that toil,
Should understand it all to work with Him,
Or else ignore our own intelligence?

Is there such need of mystery, that more
Must *be* than is revealed? Or, if revealed,
Than all can understand? This seems not just,
So far at least as this world is concerned,
Since he has made us capable of it,
Possessed of mind and exercising thought,
And with desire for knowledge infinite.
God would not surely stint us of His truth?

A Revelation 'tis of God, in all,
And nothing more nor less, in very truth;
As will appear when we reflect that heat,

ESTHER.

The subtle solvent of all earthly things,
(Itself no more than motion in effect,)
Is capable of comminuting worlds
As readily as it dissolves the dew,
Till nothing shall be left but formless air,
As void of qualities as forms at last;
And so it may be of destroying them.
From whence we're led to think there's nothing left
But *Motion* to restore, as it destroys
The forms of things. And when we look for more,
We're forced t'assume, without support of facts,
There is a point where such division ends,
Or infinite divisibility—
As of the subtlest elements themselves
On which the universe securely rests.
Both things absurd, as soon as we reflect—
For comminution once begun in them,
By this or any other agency,

ESTHER.

Might be, what ne'ertheless *could never* be,
Continued ever through eternity.

Or yet again: 'Tis matter self-sustained,
Its forms and substance so inseparable
As to be always found as one in all.—
Or motion *only*, manifesting God;
Evolving every form and quality,
Or in the objective world beyond, or in
Our minds as imaging that world to us?
Yet 'tis *not* matter, as 'tis here defined,
Since form and substance are *not* one in all,
As of their nature and their offices;
For that which late was solid,—fluid now,—
Anon shall float away as gas, with naught
Of semblance left to show what it had been,
And never one, *inseparably* in aught,
Or in the atom or the universe.

ESTHER.

And when we question *substance* of itself,
The subtle ether underlying all,
We find *it* one, immutably, as such,
As common unto all, and without bounds,
And so of its own nature infinite,
And undeterminable as of course,
Except as it is wrought upon by *force*;
From whence it follows and must needs ensue,
Form is derived of motion as its source,
And quality, like form, but measures it.

And when we have considered *form* apart,
As imaged by our minds *subjectively*,
We find no measure, for the form *within*,
In the objective world *without*. Not one
Which can determine its bounds acc'rately,
And fix its length, its depth, its breadth, in space,
Nor gauge to estimate its qualities.
The mind alone, which forms, can deal with them

ESTHER.

As mere subjective verities of thought
By mind produced, and so by mind resolved.

And so we must conclude that form, as such,
Has no material basis in itself;—
And qualities belong not unto things:
They do but work in us responsively
A reflex of the movements going on
Beyond ourselves, in every thing we see,
And manifest it simply unto man.

And this appears so when we question sense,
Our only means of dealing with the world;
For touch is powerless, indistinct, and vain,
So long as it is motionless—so long
As there is only contact of the nerve;—
With that we could determine palpably,
Without sensation, save of heat or cold—
(Heat, naught but motion; cold, the want of it,)

ESTHER.

And so continues till the finger's moved,
And then appreciation follows it,
And hard and soft, and smooth and rough, and all
Of kindred verities, are recognized.

So, too, the tongue, when we would use the taste,
Awakes no answering movement of the thought,—
Sweet, sour, bitter, whatsoe'er it be,
Distinguishes the morsel in the mouth;—
Naught is determin'd while 'tis passive there,
And only when, in masticating it,
'Tis moved against the palate, as of course,
And o'er the sentient surface of the nerves,
Those nerves awake to answer it in us.

So, too, in smelling: though the nose be filled
With the most pungent odors that are known,
Yet no determination can be made
Until, by drawing in the air with force,
A motion is established; then the nerve,

ESTHER.

Of delicate appreciation prompt,
Communicates that motion to the mind.

And when we hear, it is as if designed
To indicate this wondrous truth to us,
That motion only can communicate,
As motion only can occasion sound,
And make us cognizant of it. For till
The air is moved propulsively, and beats
Upon the drum-like membrane of the ear,
The thunder had been voiceless as unheard!
We cannot hear unless that drum be beat,
And motion follows, as the consequence,
In discord or in harmony of sound.

And so in seeing—it is motion still;
(For light, like heat, is motion, and no more.)
The waves of light in quick succession rolled
Upon the nerves—all forms are reproduced
By *recreation* in th' observer's mind,

ESTHER.

Each in its outlines acc'rately and just,
And shaded thus and clothed upon with hues,
And promptly—as the mind responsive moves
To the velocity which colors all,
Till all appears as beautiful as true—
A microcosm of the world beyond;
And *kept* in vision while such motion lasts—
The soul of its own substance forming it—
As God by generative act (in thought)
Produces all things of Himself alone,
And still maintains as He produces them.
And so we must conclude as 't were of course,
The World is not what it appears to be,
A gross material one, throughout all space,
Form built in *matter*, substance one with form,
And so partaking qualities as well,
But motion only and effect in all,
As imaging the God beyond us here,

ESTHER.

And so to be maintained while it subsists
By the same Power which created it,
Lest it should fail and perish like a dream.

'Tis motion all in fact, as in effect,
Or in the world beyond or in our minds,
The God in all and manifest to us.

And whence such motion? Whence but of our God,
At work continually and moving us,
Till we produce His image of our thought,
A power and movement so omnipotent,
We must attribute them to Him in it,
The Maker and Preserver of the World—
The True revealed in Beauty, God to Man;
And more than Truth, the *good* as well as True.
For here is more than Mind informed by Mind.
We have a sense of Purity within
Himself alone could have implanted there;

ESTHER.

We see and feel and can but recognise ;
A sense of Purity no less than Truth,
That finds its counterpart in Righteousness,
The living Image of the living God:
The Pure in Truth thus manifest in deed,
When God and Man are seen to act as one,—
The Man abased, and God ennobling him,
Till Man is raised to God and God made Man.

The beatific vision which inspired
The Prophet and the Priest of former days,
And led them to foretell the coming Lord,
The promised Saviour of the fallen World;—
The vision which enraptured Saint and Sage,
When they were led to look alone to Him,
As offering of His mercy life and hope,
When all beyond was dark and desolate,
And nothing stood between them and the grave;

ESTHER.

Life passing unto death—hope to despair—
And all beside involved in mystery—
Inscrutable to Angels and to Men;—
The vision of the living God in all,
If dimly seen in any *one* alone,
And seldom in *communities* as yet,
Yet flashing out at times in very deed,
As one or more were moved of Righteousness,
To break in glory on the world at last,
When in the time appointed Christ should come,
And in the flesh of all, a perfect man,
Restore the Man to God, and God to Man—
The Man to God and God to Man in Life;—
The life which, springing forth of Purity
In Truth, and animating all as one,
Shall make a new world of the old—till all
Be new once more, and Heaven appears on Earth,
And Man—redeemed, regenerate, and free—

ESTHER.

Regains his place among the "Sons of God,"
And all the kingdoms of the world have come
To be "the kingdoms of the Lord and Christ's,"
And none can sit in darkness and in death.
The Life, wherever seen, forever known,
Thro' all the world, in every age and clime,
In man or woman, as the life of God;
Or, in its simple rounds of Faith and Love
And Hope, regardless of itself, of all
Save God—the object of its toil alone;
Or, in its more triumphant phase at last,
As crowned with thorns, and fastened to its cross,
It yields its suffering spirit up to God,
And dies rejoicing in its view of rest,
The Witness of its Maker here on Earth.

And so again we're moved of Righteousness,
The Life God leads among us here, *in truth*,

ESTHER.

To follow after Him and share that Life,
With all its promise of Eternity,
When this vain world, the shadow of the True,
Gives place to that beyond it—Earth to Heaven—
And we are clothed with Glory as of Him.

What, then, is Evil—if God moves in all,
Controlling all, and us, who live in Him,—
The only Power seemingly at work,
And righteous always e'en as He is true?

Evil exists, like all things else, *in deed*:
As when we brave the Power who controls,
And, foll'wing up the Spirit of our minds,
Endeavor—tho' the effort be in vain,
Save as it brings reproach unto ourselves—
To live some other life than that of His;
The evil that we will, o'erruled for good,

ESTHER .

Ay, tho' the act involve a world in guilt,
Condemning us and justifying Him.

What, then, are we? Immortal Souls—in truth,
Imperishable beings, like to God,
And His true Offspring, since we now exist
And could not *be* except as *born* of Him,
The common Parent of the human Race,
And sole foundation of all Being known;
And, one with Him of *nature* as at first,
And like Him, also, free to will and do,
And capable of living as He lives,
We had not been dissevered in our lives
But for rebellion 'gainst Him in Sin.

Thus Man and God were parted at the first,
And Death ensued, to take the place of Life,
And Darkness settled o'er the world around
For want of Light, as well as Life, in us;

ESTHER.

But, Light restored, with Life in Christ, to all,
And *manifest* in Righteousness as well,
We need but be restored to God, "re-born,"
And follow after holiness *in deed*,
To enter upon Hope in Purity,
And share a glory which shall never fail.
"Re-born," I say; for, tho' all else remain
The *same* as when 't was made "*Good*," as at first,
Save only as 'tis dark or cursed of Sin,
It is not so with us. *We fell in Sin*,
And, falling so from Purity in Truth,
We were so far removed from Deity,
That God, in pity of our wretched state,
Has condescended to renew our Souls
By entering in and being born of *Us*;
And so, "the *Virgin* compassing a man,"
The Holy Jesus, God and Man, appeared.
That *We*, renewed of Him, "Regenerate,"

ESTHER.

Of "Water and the Spirit" of our Lord,
(The only "Laver of the Soul,") might be
Prepared to enter upon life and light,
And follow Him, in them, to God and Heaven;
And so, renewed *continually* in Him,
As we may fail of weakness or of guilt,
"His Body" bread, "His Blood" the "wine" of Life,
Till, all defilements of the Soul removed,
We pass with Him to Immortality.

What, then, our Powers, and what our proper Work,
If God be all in all, alone in Power?
We think, we feel, resolve, and act; we live
In all essential to our several lives;
And for the work, as proper to our powers,
Our exercise of mind and heart and will,
'Tis found in strict obedience unto God,
As clearly set before us in His laws,

ESTHER.

And by Himself administered to us;
And, furthermore, in so partaking Life—
In our communion with Himself in Christ—
As to display that God, and not ourselves,
By meek submission to whate'er may come,
Or whether prosperous or unfortunate;—
And yet again, in kindness unto those,
Who claim our help—our brethren and our friends—
Sharing with them what He has given us;
And, lastly, living so that we may be
Prepared to quit this world when He shall call,
Without a murmur or regret,—without
A feeling but of joy,—in view of rest.

And still we die! And still we weep the dead!
Friend after friend is taken from our side,
And we must fall as surely in our turn!
What serves it, then, to hug this hope of life,

ESTHER.

In view of suffering, sorrow, and of death?
Why should we hope, if we but live to die,—
To die, and perish utterly at last?
So speaks the nat'ral man of nat'ral light.
We do not die! What we regard as death
Is only such to sight. Here should we rest.
The soul may disappear, the body "rot,"
But who can say the absent man is dead,
Simply because we see him here no more?
The body is a perishable thing,
Never the same from hour to hour: in time,
A mere embodiment of *force* in all,
And "dies." But we? We know not that we die!
Could we unlearn what we so vainly learn,
And stand upon the simple truth we know,
We had not been dismayed with fears of death,
And troubled as to what may never come!

ESTHER.

Our very life is still a mystery :
We only *know* that we are quick in *deed*,
And so, for aught we know, may live forever—
Nay, since we *are* in being, must live on ;
Or God, who made us other than Himself,
And only different as we live in sin,
Must merge us all into Himself once more,
Both good and bad, ere we can cease to be,
And bring confusion on Himself at last.

We live in deed, and needs must live fore'er,
If true to Him who made us to show forth
His wisdom, power, and goodness in our lives ;
Or die, as we, regardless of His will,
Live to ourselves and perish like the brute,
As senseless and regardless of our hope.
All other life is death—a dying life—
The only death we ever know in time.

ESTHER.

We must partake the life of God to live,—
The life of God as offered us in Christ.

And lo, that Life!—so beautiful and true—
So beautiful in Man, so true in God,
Is all that ever offered hope to us,
Since purity in truth shall surely be
When all beside has perished utterly—
The life of faith and hope and charity,
And one with God thro' all eternity.

Can any doubt of this, and still have hope—
Hope of some grosser life? Such hope is vain,
And can at last but bring us to despair—
A sensuous dream, like all our other dreams—
To be dissolved when we approach the grave.
The gate of glory is the tomb of Christ,
Giving us glimpses of a nobler World,

ESTHER.

Despite the clouds and darkness of our path,
And all the sorrows which afflict our souls,
Wherein the man of God may still attain,
To all the glory of his first estate,
And all the hope we parted with in sin.

And still we die! And still we weep the dead!

Death is not true, or all beside is false.

Life closed in death! all life is but a cheat,

Or God, possessed of wisdom and of love,

Is powerless to preserve what he has made;

Or, we are yet more hopeless of th' event,

Created in mere pastime—born to die,

To suffer and to sorrow while we live,

And, dying, serve no purpose in our death!

We live in truth, as we are quick in deed,

Our hope upheld by righteousness alone.

In Christ we live the beautiful and true!

ESTHER.

What then is Death—destruction's ghostly lord?
O'er *sinful* Man, Death rules a power supreme,—
A tyrant who nor love nor pity knows,—
A stern destroyer,—foe throughout all time.
And still to him, who lives in Christ the while,
Death is a phantom when most palpable,
The shadowy lord of an unreal realm,
And spite the outward terrors of his state,
The welcome usher of a better world,—
The only world where sorrows never come.

The dusky pall, the weeping crowd, the grave,
The pale cold corpse decaying in its shroud,
These, and the wailings of the broken heart,
Make death seem hideous to the eye of sin.
And these, if true of him in all, to all,
The real attributes of his stern rule,
Would make him terrible to every Man:—

ESTHER.

His pathway strewn with ruins and with tears,
Sufferings endured and sorrows vainly borne,
A holocaust of hate, Hell's triumph here,
Within the very boundaries of Heaven,
The world of sin the only real world,
And hope in Christ the day-dream of the fool.

Not so! Herein the show of things prevails;
The truth is absent still in all we view,
And all is hideous as a consequence.
"He is not dead, but sleepeth," Jesus says.
Not dead? Then Death itself is not! Death gone,
Gone at a word the Lord of Life hath spoken;
Vanished his shad'wy rule, receding still,
Himself resolved in naught,—mattock and spade
And mound of new-raised earth, and sombre pall,
And weeping crowd, and pallid corpse,—all gone,
Dissolved, and parted from bewildered man.

ESTHER.

Man stands in presence of the Deity!
Stupendous miracle of truth and love,
The blind behold—the dead are raised to life!
“Lazarus! come forth!” and, free of all bonds,
The friend of Jesus lives to die no more!
A miracle! a miracle! Man shouts;
A God! a God! responsive worlds reply.
The spirit, risen in the power of God,
Returns once more to animate its clay,
And glorify its Saviour in its life.

And see the love of God, how vast it is,
And prompt to sympathize with us in grief,
And give us back the friends we lose in death.
As Jesus paused before the gate of Nain,
A mourning crowd was passing to the grave,
And in their midst the mother of the dead,
A widowed mother, weeping for her child,

ESTHER.

The sorrow of the desolate, and lo!
While all her friends were powerless there, and mute
In presence of a grief so masterful,
His heart was moved to pity—He, whose life
Was passed in offices of love, and who
Had never yet looked on our griefs unmoved,
Could not behold that mother's agony
Without the wish to banish her despair.
“Weep not!” he said in tones which reached all hearts,
So pitiful they seemed, and full of love—
“Weep not!” O words of comfort and of hope!
Poor stricken mourner, 'tis thy God who speaks,
And bids thee hope, for He has sorrowed too.
Sad was the face of Jesus while He spoke,—
Yea, passing sorrowful—for in that hour
The shadow of His cross was on Him fall'n.
Before His vision rose th' accursed tree,
The mocking crowd, the felon's doom, and all

ESTHER.

The fierce ingratitude of Man to Him.
Yet still he loved the ingrate, still he felt
His heart o'erflow with human sympathy;—
“Weep not,” He said, and, bending o'er the bier,
While all the wond'ring crowd stood mutely by,
He called the dead to life with words of power,
And gave “the risen,” quickened and amazed,
Back to the loving arms which ope'd for him.
Then fear fell on the multitude who saw,
And rumor with her thousand tongues proclaimed
The presence of a God! But what of Him,
The Lord of love and life? E'en as he came
He went, and save a few, a faithful few—
His work performed, uncared for and alone—
The world, which owned his power, forgot his love.
Death overcome in Christ, his iron rule
No more the subject Earth deplores in vain;
But life and happiness, restored once more,

ESTHER.

Are beautiful and true in all around.

Death known no more, change beautiful succeeds,

And all varieties of lovely forms

Pursue each other through the realms of space,

And deck the ages as they march through Time

To herald in Eternity for Man.

And Man himself, with endless life endowed,

And happiness commensurate with life,

But dons and doffs the *body* which he wears

Through all the changes of this mortal state—

The robe which he must part with in the dust

Ere he puts on the livery of Heaven;—

One, wholly one, as it enfolds the just,

Christ's "seamless robe" of immortality.

Such is our hope! No other hope appears,—

Confusion else must soon involve the world!

How else unthread the tangle of this Life?

ESTHER.

To what high court of ultimate resort
Shall we repair to find the absent Truth,
And so resolve the mystery of this world?

There is a world beyond the reach of sin,
Revealed in Christ—a true and beauteous world,
The fair embodiment of all the *just*,
And all *things* minist'ring to them, in Him—
Which He inhabits. This we look upon
In sin, and with our dim sin-darkened eyes,
Is transitory all, and false as vain,—
A mirror only of our many lusts,
And clothed with darkness even as a pall.
The *real* world we see not, cannot see
Until our eyes are opened by its Lord—
The world of faith and hope and charity,
Where, truth and beauty met, reveal the good,
And God is all in all. That world is Heaven!

ESTHER.

There is a true and beauteous life of love,
In which our minds and hearts are raised to God,
Above the perishable things of time,
And all the happiness derived of them;
And this life corresponds with that fair world,—
And all is glorious—'tis the life of God!

Who doubts of this is still misled of lust
And lapsed in sin—his guilty soul would rest
Secure from conscience in a dream of Death,
And free from Retribution in the grave:
A wretch whose vile and sacrilegious hand
Would veil the True in presence of its God,
Lest it should bring reproach. The very flowers,
Fragrant and beautiful, to such a man
Bring no delight. They have a voice for him
He would not hear. And sick at heart, with doubts
And fears which goad to madness, he would crush

ESTHER.

Each lovely monitor beneath his heel,
And, were it given to consuming hate,
Tread down into one foul and shapeless mass
All that remained of loveliness on earth.
Yet all in vain. Consuming Hate is made
To manifest, as Pharaoh did of yore,
The glory of the one, true, living God,
Guiding His people to their land of rest,
The heavenly Canaan, 'mid the wastes of sin.

Surely, if all things else deficient were
In proof of such a glorious world and life,
The very flowers of Spring had witnessed them.
We find them ever in our path thro' life,
But never so by chance. By chance? Ah, no!
For he who works not vainly placed them there
To teach our hearts, as He alone can teach,
Love of the True, the Beautiful, the Good!

ESTHER.

Each flower a miracle in proof of them;
They speak to us from Nature's Spring, of life
Beyond this life. The changes they pass through
Are typical of those which wait on us.
Through them we pass to immortality!
God will not fail us! Faint of hope are we.
Were hope the sole dependence of our lives,
And poor in faith, where all demand our trust,
Shall man succeed to man—the son the sire—
Nation to nation—race to race forever—
Without apparent motive for their being
Beyond the caprice of the Deity?
Infinitude of Work, without design—
Infinitude of Trust, without a hope—
Infinitude of Love, without fruition—
All exercise of feeling and of thought
Bounded by earth—Virtue and Vice ignored—
Evil and Good confounded in event—

ESTHER.

And all of progress and improvement vain
And transitory as the passing hour,
Which gives them momentary consequence!
Can this be so? O God! Almighty Lord!
Thou who art present in the meanest thing;
And, in the meanest, glorious in thy power,
Thy wisdom, and thy goodness! Can it be
That Thou has so created man, that he,
Once cognizant of this, must needs become
A creature without motive for his life—
A being without solace in his death—
A wretch to whom existence is a curse?
Nature, thro' all her bounds, proclaims it false!
The heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars,
Together—all things visible or hid—
Proclaim the rule of Wisdom and of Love!
And love, the immortality of man!
And still there is a living death we die,

ESTHER.

From which true love alone can set us free—
The faithless, hopeless, sensuous life of earth!
Its evil spirit guides us while we go,
And rules us from the cradle to the grave,
Dissevering us from God and man alike,
Till we are wanting in all hope and joy,
And naught remains but ruthless hate and hell!
A ling'ring death it is, yet sure as slow,
And endless as the torments which it brings!
O, could we realize it ere too late,
We might escape the ruin which ensues!
Hopeful and happy, as we are in youth,
Could we but know what waits upon old age—
Its bitter disappointments and despair—
We should not follow blindly as we're led
To meet destruction at the hands of God!
And still that Evil Spirit leads us on
From day to day, from year to year in sin,

ESTHER.

Persuading us, with artful tongue, to think
We are sufficient for ourselves in all!
We, who are slaves of lust and cannot act,
Save as the Tyrant, whom we serve, allows!
We who are mortal and in sin must die,
We who may die to-morrow, nay, to-day!
Alas, for us, the youthful and the aged,
We urge each other madly towards the grave!

And still we choose the Evil, shun the Good,
Walk confident in folly, bold in guilt,
Until our souls are moulded in the forms
Of our delusions, hideous as our lives,
And so, deformed by iniquity,
We die, and go to meet the God we've wronged!
What serves it, then, that few behold our shame,
Deceiving others, and ourselves, perhaps,
Since there is One who looks upon our souls,

ESTHER.

Deformed and hideous as they surely are,
Before the beauty of whose unveiled face
We yet must quail in horror and alarm!
Ah, that we could anticipate the hour,
Now 'mid the guilty dreams in which we rest,
We would not be so satisfied in sin;
And though it should prostrate us in the dust,
An utter overthrow had still been gain,
Could we arise in penitence and tears
To lead a purer and a nobler life?

In vain the wish! No dread o'ertakes the soul—
We walk as strong in falsity as truth,
Pursuing our delusions on to death
Like eager huntsmen following up the chase,
And finding pastime in the jaws of Hell—
We cannot hope to profit of such sport!
The ruthless Soldier seeks the field of strife,

ESTHER.

Thirsting for slaughter like a beast of prey
Let loose upon his fellow-man in wrath!
The roaring cannon and the reeking sword,
The struggle and the victory, his life,
And after slaying others falls himself.
The soldier fallen! What remains of him?
A bloody corpse, to fill a bloody grave!
His name, remembered for some years, perhaps,
And then forgotten like more humble names!
Had this vain world a hope to offer man,
There had been fewer victims of its praise—
It can but give the proudest of them graves!
The Politician, spider-like in all,
Weaves life into a web to snare his prey,
And spins and climbs, still mounting as he spins,
Until he gains the vantage which he seeks,
And holds the silly crowd within his power;
And still Death follows him o'er every thread

ESTHER.

Towards every victim he has thus ensnared,
In every triumph he has won from time,
Until his skein of years be all spun out,
And all of life exhausted in his web,
His enemy o'ertakes him in his toils.

The Miser sells his priceless soul for gold,
The dross we dig and must return to earth,
And death is still the purchaser of souls!
Wealth heaped on wealth, until the man himself,
Body and soul, is purchased for a price,
And still the man is wretched of his fears,
Lest one should come and steal his hoards away!
Living as dead, and dying, yet alive,
The veriest fool of all. Our wants supplied,
We gain no more of time, howe'er we toil.
The Thief shall come ere yet the night be spent,
And that for which he bartered hope itself
Shall be possessed by others when he's dead!

ESTHER.

When Infidelity, in league with lust,
Grows bold and offers sinful joys to al',
Then good men weep and hope indignant flies
The homes of men, to find her home in Heaven!
The giddy multitude, unawed by fear,
Cast all restraint away. The Matron feels
The furious thirst of unappeased desire,
And threads the mazy dance with wanton step
And amorous look, unconscious of her shame.
The Maiden, following after her in sin,
Drinks deep of lust's intoxicating draught,
And in the madd'ning whirl of pleasure borne,
With flushing cheeks and bosom all unveiled,
Twines like a lithe Bacchante round the youth
Whom she devours with her flaming eyes;
And that fond youth, thus fettered in her toils,
Be sure has parted with the hope of life!
All manly beauty faded from his face

ESTHER.

Tell of the constant riot and debauch;
The very color mantling o'er his brow
Belongs unto the wine cup, not the man,
As weak from drink he staggers thro' the dance,
And slabbers like an idiot in his glee!
And still the revel grows, and still the crowd,
The faithless crowd, all emulous of shame,
Move on, while fast and furious grows the mirth,
And all, with merry measures mocking time,
The drunken revellers greet the conscious Morn.

The sensuous pleasures which we follow here
Are but so many lures of death and hell—
A few years hence and they shall charm no more.
Joy to be joy must be eternal joy—
All other happiness is but a dream!
Our youthful lusts intoxicate like wine,
While we rejoice in madness and in death;

ESTHER.

God grant we be not drunken till too late!
Such joys are fleeting! Sorrow comes anon,
Howe'er it be avoided for the time.
It comes with death, if it come not before,
And death may come to-morrow, nay to day;
And should it not o'ertake us till old age,
It dogs our footsteps ever while we walk,
And like a shadow lengthens thro' the past.
Manhood looks back regretfully to youth,
And all its parted dreams of hope and joy,
While Age stands maundering o'er its failing powers.
Death, when it comes, thus comprehends all woes,
And crowds the dying hour with vain regrets,
And makes us shed the tears which now should flow.
Better, far better, we should sorrow oft,
Nay always, than to sorrow when too late,—
And few there are who weep not of the wise,

ESTHER.

For since the day when our first parents fell
The children of the Promise feed on tears.

Such joys are false: our sorrows only true;
And so God comforts us when we must weep.
Could we *rejoice* in Time, our heaven were *here*:
We could not hope for more as still beyond—
It were enough! What need were there of more?
Now, since we weep, we know that God is good,
And would not rob us of all happiness,
But to bestow superior joys on us;
And in this hope we rest contentedly,
As ante-dating Heaven in our hope.
And this is real joy! All else is false—
False as the world we love, the life we lead,
And that foul spirit which possesses us,
And guides our wand'ring footsteps to the grave
In God we rest beyond the power of doubt,

ESTHER.

Beyond the power of sorrow or of pain,
Beyond the power of devils and of death!
And so we labor, looking still beyond,
To life immortal and eternal joy—
An endless world, as beautiful as true.

Such joys are fatal! When we joy in Time,
We give no thought unto Eternity.
Our thoughts are busy with the passing world,
Our hearts are wedded to its vanities;
The morrow is forgotten in to-day,
And still the morrow comes with wrath and wo,
While we are dreaming thus deliciously.
When we are wakened, therefore, from such dreams
By any sorrow God may please to send,
We should be thankful, since he calls us up,
As from the bed of death on which we lie,
Lest we should sleep and dream forever there.

ESTHER.

He is most merciful: as kind as just,
He visits us in sorrow, thus to win
Our hearts from this poor perishable world,
And bind them to Himself in Christ alone—
Dissolving our illusions, taking friends
That we may have no friend save only Him—
No friend save Him who's gone before to Heaven,
The object of our worship and our love.

And still we worship idols!—*all*, in sooth,
Youth, manhood, and old age are bound to them;
If not, as formerly, in stocks and stones,
And all the grossness of the olden times,
Yet quite as surely in our fond desires,
And eke the objects which elicit them,
And with a trust, too, and devotedness
We never think of offering unto God.
Especially is this sin our sin in youth,

ESTHER.

Where Passion prompts and Fancy is our guide:
The sweet enchantress who, at every step,
With magic wand calls lovely visions up,
Until the earth seems heaven in our view!
And so it is we brave the wrath of God
To meet but disappointment in our path—
And disappointment followed by despair,
When life itself approaches to the grave!

Fair is the morning of existence here,
Fair in its promise of a glorious life!
The world a never-ending round of scenes,
Thro' which our path, as it is lengthened out,
Seems but the road to endless happiness.
Now childhood with its weakness disappears,
The form develops into loveliness,
And the intelligence matures in strength,
While the fond heart, as full of love as hope,

ESTHER.

Seeks everywhere an object upon which
To pour forth its affections lavishly.
And lo! the object worthy of all love
Appears in all around of good and true,
The beautiful in nature as in grace!—
God, present in His wisdom, power, and love,
And ever ready as in place to yield
The full return of love for love to all,
And so to satisfy our utmost wish!
Why, then, doth youth not cleave to Him in Christ,
And offer Him the first fruits of its life?

Under "the law" no less would be received:
The "first" of everything was offered God—
Firstborn of man, firstborn of beast, and more,
The very first fruits of the fields were His,—
Since it was held the duty of them all
To serve Him first to whom all life was due,
And thus they made their offerings unto Him!

ESTHER.

And why should youth not give its "first" like them,
Since it is *that* the young alone can give:
The first fruits of their days—their noblest gift,
Affection and intelligence, yet theirs
In all their vigor and their purity.
For what can age bestow, should youth refuse
Its gifts? The old man who has had his day—
Is it his riches he would yield to God?
He can no longer use them now himself.
Is it his pleasures? Healthful now no more,
They can no longer satisfy his soul.
Is it his honor? Look on him, and see
Its chaplet withered on his wrinkled brow.
Is it his influence? It is but a name,
And men turn off in scorn of him the while:
His hand, too feeble now to hold it fast,
The rod of empire drops from out his grasp!
His sins he quits, in sooth, but 'tis because

ESTHER.

His very sins refuse to cling to him—
No longer will they bear him company.
He flies the world, but only flies for that
It is no longer the same world to him.
He seeks to God, perhaps, but seeks alone
As to a refuge which may shelter him
While the avenger pants upon his tracks.
Not so when youth is given to the Lord :
God is not then profanely told to wait
Till all but Him are served and satisfied,
Or sent away contemptuously to glean
The fields, when all the harvests of the life
Have been secured and to another given.

Why, then, I ask once more, do we refuse
The early offering of our life to God?
Alas! it is because in our own hearts,
As in the world beyond, there dwells fore'er

ESTHER.

A spirit potent as 'tis dangerous,
And ever in hostility to God!
The evil spirit which possesses us,
Omnipotent o'er all who yield to it,
And omnipresent in the lures it spreads,—
Now wealth, now fame, now power, as we incline,
And now the pleasures we derive of them;
“Feast and be merry” it proclaims to all,
“Feast while you may, to-morrow you shall die!”
Rest and refreshment without toil are given,
And we accept them even as bestowed,
Without a thought or care beyond the hour.
And every form most pleasing to the eye
It takes—a very Proteus, as it seems—
While off'ring all the promise of the world:
A thousand paths hedged in with sweetest flowers
As 'twere to tempt us in pursuit of them;
And siren voices urging us to stray

ESTHER.

Along the ways of error and of guilt!
Our eyes and ears both ravished with delight,
What wonder that we quit the narrow road,
So steep, so difficult, that leads to Heaven,
To take the broad and downward one, so plain,
So easy in its grade, and where we find
Such pleasant company in kindred souls,
It seems but fair that we should follow it
Unto the goal it offers to our hope!

The choice is made, and without more delay
We seek the world in confidence and hope,
And all appears to justify our choice!
We hope, because, as yet, we have not known
The disappointments of maturer life!
And as we hope, so do we yield our trust,
Because as yet we have not been betrayed!
And as we trust and hope, so do we love

ESTHER.

As 'twere of our own fancy, looking still
To find some friend whose love shall equal ours,
And be to us as God. Alas! the while
The day approaches when, betrayed by all,
And by ourselves no less than by our friends,
The heart of youth, so buoyant and so fond,
Its airy hopes all vanished like sweet dreams,
Shall feed on disappointments and on tears,
As we go down in old age to the grave!
Nay, God, in wrath of such neglect of Him,
May not delay so long the stroke of fate,
But visit promptly, as he sometimes does.
The morn of life may be o'ercast and dark
With sore afflictions long ere they should come
Of nat'ral consequence to godless life,
And disenchantment, like the tempest, break
Upon the soul of youth, and leave behind
Naught but the ruin which accompanies it.

ESTHER.

The sun may shine as brightly as before,
The moon as sweetly from her blue throne beam,
Yet only to illumine the waste around
They can no longer gladden with their light:
The temple of the heart has been profaned,
Its idols overthrown and trampled on,
As things offensive now as profitless.
But for the wounded spirit bowed therein,
Chained to the wreck which has o'ertaken it,
All unavailing are its sighs and tears:
The veil which hid it from itself is rent,
And all is disappointment and despair.
Hope finds no sure abiding place on earth.

And still we love this perishable world,
Tho' but the shadow of our youthful lusts,
And grieve to part with it when we must part.
We love its joys, tho' they must end in grief,

ESTHER.

We love its life, tho' it must end in death.
The poet sings, and still the poet's song
Is all of earth, the sensuous alone!
Alas! that Death and Hell should ever win
Such heartfelt praises from the dying man.
The cheat of Time, immortal in his verse,
Stands as a monument of human shame,
And disappointment lives in deathless song.

In other days 'twas thus fair Sappho sang.
Her earth-born strains yet linger round our hearts
With earth-born hopes. Yet where is she who sang?
Lo! while the evening breezes sadly sigh
Round famed Lucat  's beetling cliffs, the waves
Which burning Sappho wed with amorous song,
In mournful murmurings their plaint prolong,
And mingle with their requiem for the dead.

ESTHER.

But why recall so sad a fate? To show
What all things teach. Such life is closed in death!
The very tribute of the world's applause
Is burdened with the melancholy thought,
How vainly did the poet dream! Despite
Her deathless song, how surely did she die!
The fond maid hoped eternal rest to find
Amid the darkling waters of the flood,
And, braving death, found death eternal too.
For, Sappho dead, remorse forever haunts
The suicide in presence of her God!

Not so with him, the royal saint and sage:
The faithful David gave his Harp to God.
Nor can the universe produce a bard
Superior to Judah's minstrel king;
And life itself must waste away in death
Ere men shall cease to thrill with David's song.

ESTHER.

Methinks I hear it now, that hallowed strain,
As hymned at night when all the world was still,
And the pale moon sole mistress of the heaven,
Flooding Jerusalem with her silvery light.
Back thro' the past my soul transported flies,
To list the low, sweet tones of that sad harp;
Back thro' each winged year, whose echoes swell
With answ'ring strains, prolonged by hoary Time;
Back to the time and place where David drew
His deathless harmonies from lifeless wires,
Where still the gathering crowd draw near in awe,
With joy and wonder mute. Thro' every street,
Angels unseen on tireless wing bent o'er,
To listen to his song of trust and love,
And bear the accepted hymn of praise to God:
Love shedding love and light into his soul,
And thrilling him with raptures all divine;
The beautiful still wedded to the true,

ESTHER.

And living in the words of sacred song,
By saints on earth repeated thro' all time,
By saints in Heaven answered thro' the skies,—
Man's hope of life as realized in Christ.

The artist dreams! No dream of sleep more vain—
An idle dream. Ah! wherefore, god-like art,
Dost thou still dwell in darkness with the dead?
He dreams of beauty—beauty born of Earth!
And, proud of powers creative, seeks to fix
On passive canvas or the senseless stone
His fond creations, lifeless as his hope!
How vainly all, his failures shall declare.
Trustful and loving, let him humbly go,
And learn of Wisdom, in her school of life,
Where he may find the charm in all—the good!
This done, he shall deserve immortal fame—
Immortal fame, poor recompense for art!

ESTHER.

For god-like art, a god-like recompense:
A crown of joy, the glory of the just,
When its own life shall image forth the Lord.

Who scorns the patient study of the good,
His art is vain. Lo! Venus thus appears,
The sea-born beauty, rising from the waves,
Faultless in form: famed Phidias' hand of old
Creative gave no fairer to the eye!
In conscious loveliness unrobed she stands,
To challenge admiration of the world.
Such beauty, as of yore, subdued mankind,
When Egypt's Queen held Cæsar's heart in thrall,
Dissolved in wine the jewel of her crown—
The priceless pearl of female modesty—
To furnish forth a vile repast to lust!
Beauty, all sensual, whose fleshly charms
Inflame the heart to madness, and destroy

ESTHER.

All hope of purity and peace for man.
Deluded art! one charm alone had given
Such fatal beauty all the grace of Heaven—
That charm still wanting, beauty proves a bawd.

Yet look once more, the sanguine artist cries:
The chaste Diana, bathing in the brook,
As risen from the limpid waves she stands,
Despite the recent chase and burning heat,
All fresh and rosy as the early morn!
The crystal waters showered from her hair,
And hung like pearls upon her marble limbs;
Those marble limbs where strength and grace are blent
In all the wond'rous symmetry of youth!
Alone, amid protecting rocks and woods,
No prying eye to cause the blush of shame,
She stands abashed and blushing as she sees
Her fair proportions mirrored by the stream.

ESTHER.

The very canvas seems endowed with life,
And all appears before us as a dream!
The good is imaged, yet we sigh to think
The work is lifeless. Beauty is no dream!
O, god-like art, exalt thy hope above;
And beauty, when united to the true,
Shall dwell forever in the artist's soul.
The proudest triumphs of creative skill
Can only shadow forth the absent good.
The good must live—our fancies are all vain!
Behold the contrast in the Cross of Christ—
The living man suspended on the tree!
More beautiful than Earth, each heavenly grace
Adorns the victim who is offered there—
No blemish nor defect. First-born of Time!
Such beauty as in Adam, ere the fall,
Such beauty Jesus offers on the Cross.
Nor is this offering of the perfect man

ESTHER.

Without its promise for the faithful few—
A perfect and a living man in all,
Offered in death to clothe us all with life.

The Cross of Jesus! so sublime a sight
Might move the dullest mind on earth to hope.
Methinks I see it now! The mount of skulls,
The mocking crowd, the haughty Pharisee,
The band of foreign soldiers gathered round
To enforce that death! The victim, passive still,
Nailed to the fatal tree! Nature amazed,
Hushed, stunned, aghast! All, all save man appalled!
Blank consternation witten over all!
The very Sun, as 't were in horror, blotted out,
And Earth, wide-yawning, to her centre riven,
Gives up her dead! I shudder while I see.
Meanwhile the scornful jest and mocking laugh,
Pass freely to and fro. The obsequious crowd,

ESTHER.

As ever forward at the beck of power,
Repeat the great man's witless gibes, and give
Free utterance to the hate which moves his heart.
The Lord of Life, triumphant over all
The hate of Man and all the power of Death,
Smiles on His foes—on Death serenely smiles,—
And while the witless finger points in scorn
His lips pronounce that love, so gracious still,
“Father, forgive; they know not what they do!”

How beautiful, how true, what love sublime!
The loving mercy of a loving heart,—
Which beats in harmony with all of good
The Earth possesses or the Heavens endow,—
With pity answers unto Man's fierce hate!
The loving prayer the dying Saviour breathed,
In all its beauty and in all its truth,
Shall plead the cause of Man with God forever!

ESTHER.

The good we seek is found in God alone!
The True and Beautiful revealed in all,—
In everything around us, every act,
Which joins the loving, trusting soul to God;
Not of this world, nor yet of Man himself,
Yet giving life to both, new life and hope,
Beyond the power of Death—imperishable!

Eternal Spirit, when Time tears away
Worlds from their orbits, suns from out their spheres,
And Time himself, decrepid from old age,
No longer marks the march of ruthless Death,
Shalt thou, triumphant, soar, set free to roam
The fields of light and strike the lyre of Heaven!

